

As fires erupted, many had no warning

The state’s destructive blazes highlight issues with the systems that officials used to alert people in harm’s way.

By PAIGE ST. JOHN

NAPA, Calif. — The Sonoma ridgeline was a sunrise of flame as Sgt. Brandon Cutting led deputies up country roads to pound on doors, hollering “Sheriff’s Office!”

Thirty minutes later, with Cutting huffing from exertion and choking in thick smoke, the evacuation of Redwood Hill was still playing out one door at a time. He followed the sound of shouts to an officer struggling to carry a disabled woman. Her house was on fire. Her shoe on the ground. The night around them was orange in every direction.

It was 11 on a Sunday night, the beginning of what would be the most destructive fire siege in California history. Frantic rescues were taking place across wine country as heavy winds ripped down power lines and the dry hills lit up in flames. Modern technology in the form of robocalls and digital alerts would not join the fight to roust sleeping residents for another half an hour.

When the warnings came, they were not received by many of those most in peril.

Two months after the wine country fires, officials still debate whether more could have been done to give residents earlier warnings before the fires swept in, ultimately killing 44 people and destroying more than 10,000 homes.

The fires highlighted the inadequacies of the emergency warnings officials employed and have prompted a push for new safety protocols. Some of the same problems occurred two months later when the Thomas fire — the largest on record in California — swept through Santa Barbara and Ventura [See **Warnings**, A12]

Neighbors help Ojai fire victims

A group of residents have started their own relief effort — from clearing debris to providing hot meals. **CALIFORNIA, B1**



Photographs by MOLLY HENNESSY-FISKE Los Angeles Times
CUSTOMS AND Border Protection Agent Aaron Bonsell follows footprints near the Rio Grande.

Weak border link at Texas’ Big Bend

Drugs and migrants are increasingly entering U.S. via a dangerous and understaffed region



BORDER PATROL agents in Presidio, Texas, prepare to drive new arrivals to another Big Bend-area station for processing.

By MOLLY HENNESSY-FISKE

PORVENIR, Texas — Two Border Patrol agents bent to study the sandy dirt like animal trackers — what they call “cutting for sign.”

They didn’t have to look far. Just yards from the Rio Grande, Agent Lee Smith pointed to footprints and scraps of carpet. Smugglers tie carpet to their shoes in hopes of covering their tracks, he said. Smith followed the rough trail through thick brush, his fellow agent close behind, wearing a bulletproof vest and carrying a long gun.

They saw no one. But the agents sensed smugglers watching, waiting.

“They come right across. What’s here to stop them?” Smith said.

In the late 1990s, border traffic moved from Southern California to remote desert stretches of Arizona; by 2013, it had moved east again to Texas’ Rio Grande Valley, the epicenter of migration and enforcement ever since.

Now, one of the things driving the Trump administration’s push for millions of dollars in new border security measures is a troubling new reality: New smuggling routes are opening up, and [See **Border**, A9]

Trump not in Golden State of mind

He has yet to visit California, a first since Eisenhower. For the president, it’s home to ‘the resistance.’

By BRIAN BENNETT

WASHINGTON — President Trump’s love for all things gold apparently doesn’t extend to the Golden State.

Trump is about to become the first president since Dwight D. Eisenhower 64 years ago to skip a visit to California during his first calendar year in office. And he doesn’t appear to have any plans to take Air Force One to the country’s most populous and economically powerful state before he marks his first full year in office Jan. 20.

Even past presidents who, like Trump, didn’t win the state’s electoral votes made it a destination, if only for California’s allure as the Golden State of campaign cash.

For Trump, it’s ground zero for “the resistance.”

A president so fixated on the 2016 election results as Trump may not want to be reminded that just 31% of California’s voters chose him while 61% decided “I’m with her” — giving Hillary Clinton over 4 million more votes and the state’s 55 electoral votes.

A few weeks afterward, President-elect Trump alleged on Twitter that there was “serious voter fraud” in California, as well as in Virginia and New Hampshire, claims for which he never suggested evidence.

Since then, California has been at the forefront of those states and organizations pushing back against Trump’s policies to vastly scale back federal health-care subsidies, environmental protections and safety regulations, and to crack down on legal as well as illegal immigration.

Trump noticed early on. California is “out of control,” he told Fox News in February.

“It’s hard to imagine an environment less alluring to him right now than deep-blue California,” said Dan Schnur, a professor of political communications at USC [See **Trump**, A9]

Mexican family demands justice in fatal police raid

Officers have given conflicting versions of an operation that left four women and two children dead.

By PATRICK J. McDONNELL

TEMIXCO, Mexico — The sealed-off house on a residential street here yields little trace of the recent bloody events inside.

Crime scene tape stretched across the imposing black metal gate — and the cop cruiser stationed outside — cannot convey what went catastrophically amiss during a police operation at 238 Francisco I. Madero St.

Shot dead during the botched assault were six family members — four women and two children, in-

cluding a 3-month-old girl, the latest collateral damage in Mexico’s drug wars.

All were kin of the home’s principal resident, Jose Antonio Valdez Chapa, whom police here call a smuggling kingpin — an allegation his family denies. He was not injured in the raid.

The Mexican press labeled the Nov. 30 incident the “Temixco Massacre,” after this gritty suburb of 115,000 adjacent to the picturesque tourist haven of Cuernavaca, two hours south of Mexico City.

The case has emerged as a human rights rallying cry and the latest black mark against Mexican police in the country’s protracted struggle against criminal gangs.

Authorities say the victims died in crossfire as police fired in self-defense.

But relatives of the dead and their attorney accuse [See **Mexico**, A4]

ENVIRONMENTAL WARRIORS



THE HTOO For The Times
AN ELDERLY woman harvests sesame in Palaung Gone village in rural eastern Myanmar.

TENSION OVER LAND IN MYANMAR

The transition from military rule has reopened grievances over land seizures that are pitting farmers against the government, influential business interests, foreign investors — and one another. **WORLD, A6**

Alabama confirms Doug Jones’ win

He becomes the first Democrat in 25 years to hold a Senate seat in the state, just hours after Roy Moore files a lawsuit to delay certification. **NATION, A8**

Weather

Warm and sunny.
L.A. Basin: 80/53. **B6**

